

# AFAP outlines what is important to community

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In an effort to improve the quality of life for the military families living and working here, Carlisle Barracks held its annual Army Family Action Plan conference Nov. 2-4 at the LeTort View Community Center.



**Members of the Housing and public works group debate the issues that will be brought to the command groups attention at the end of the AFAP conference. *Photo by Megan Clugh***

The AFAP conference gives a voice to the Soldiers and their families and allows them to not only voice any problems or shortfalls but to also offer up creative solutions to problems.

“The plan functions on the assumption that all members of the Army are the experts on Army standards of living,” said Linda Slaughter, Army Community Services, the conference sponsor. “The AFAP process is an essential ingredient in the preservation of a high quality of living for the total Army.”

During his welcome remarks, Maj. Gen. Gregg Martin, USAWC Commandant, asked the conference to “take a good, hard look at all the programs and services (Carlisle Barracks) offers.”

“Tell us, are there gaps? Are there redundancies? You be the judge. We must make sure we have the right mix of programs that help us all grow stronger in five areas, social, spiritual, emotional, family and fitness.”

Attendees were divided up into five working groups; housing and public works, community support, force support, health and dental and teen issues. All of the groups, except the teen group, consisted of different types of members of the Carlisle community; active duty and reserve Soldiers, their spouses,

DoD civilians and their spouses, and retirees.

The working groups spent the first two days discussing approximately ten issues apiece. Their mission was to narrow the issues down to the top two or three they felt was most important, come up with a solution, and then present it to the command group on the last day of the conference.

While the working groups focused on different things, every issue they brought to the command group's attention focused on enhancing both comprehensive Soldier fitness and the Army quality of life.

The health and dental group focused primarily on Soldier and family fitness. They recommended that Army doctors be allowed to refer Soldiers requiring chiropractic care to civilian practitioners if there isn't an Army facility nearby.

"Right now, a Carlisle Barracks Soldier who requires chiropractic care would have to drive down to Walter Reed Hospital," said Theresa Nickey, the group's spokesman.

The housing and public works group focused on the requirement that single Soldiers with the rank of sergeant and below be required to live in the barracks.

"I understand that barracks were designed to give young Soldiers a place to live where there would be some supervision, but here at Carlisle the youngest Soldier living in the barracks is twenty-seven years old," said Spc. Thomas Fiedler.

"This is a morale and retention issue," said Lt. Col. Ernest Szabo, Strategic Studies Institute. "To tell a single sergeant or staff sergeant who was living on the economy at another post, that he must live in the barracks here because there are empty barracks rooms contributes to Soldiers leaving the Army."

There was also a general consensus among all the groups that, while Carlisle Barracks offers many services and programs, they are not always available when it is convenient for people to go.

For example many people would like to participate in some of the exercise classes offered at the gym but are unable to, due to work constraints, to get away during the day. A request for fitness classes to be offered during the evening was suggested.

The working groups were also asked to identify the top five most valuable Army services on post and the five things that are going well at Carlisle Barracks. While each group came up with their own lists, many of the same services came up on each list. Family, Morale, Recreation and Welfare programs on post were listed by four of the five groups as one of the most valuable Army services, while medical, dental and Army Community Services were given that rating by three of the groups.

The working groups also agreed that Carlisle Barracks' youth services programs and the ability to get a medical/or dental appointment quickly were two of the things that were going well here.

Once the command group has the recommendations of the conference, they will work to implement the changes that they can at this level. Changes that require the support of either our higher MACOM, or the Department of the Army are forwarded up. It takes about a year for local issues to get to the Department of the Army level.

"AFAP works," said Slaughter. "Many improvements in the Army family's quality of life started as an AFAP issue at the local level. For example, 'TRICARE for life' started as a local AFAP issue. As did increasing the weight of household goods service members are allowed to have,"

Here on Carlisle Barracks, issues that have been brought up are listened to.

"We are getting a military clothing section at the PX because it was brought up at an earlier Carlisle Barracks AFAP conference," said Slaughter.

AFAP was created in 1980 through focus groups but was fully developed with the first official AFAP Conference held July 1983. Its mission is to help Army leaders address the needs and concerns of the total Army Family.

"In the 26 years that AFAP has operated it has spearheaded 123 pieces of legislation, over 172 policy changes, and more than 192 new or improved programs or services," said Slaughter.